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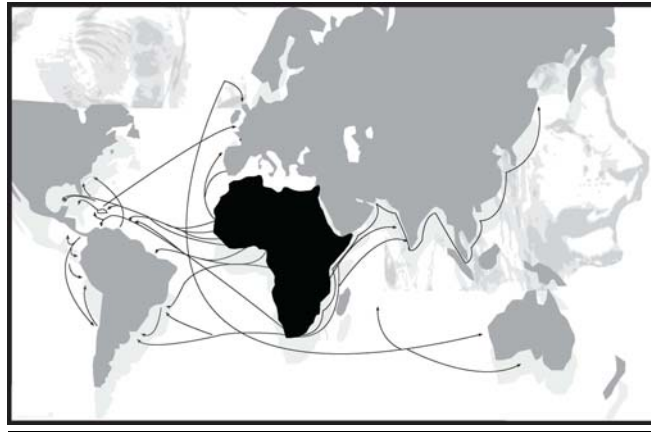
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Charting Racial Formations in the New U.S. South: Reflections on North Carolina's Latino, African-American, and Afro-Latino Relations

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John Jackson Jr., University of Pennsylvania
David Sartorius, University of Maryland, College Park
Carlos Tovaes, California State University, Northridge
Bobby Vaughn, Notre Dame de Namur University
Ben Vinson III, Johns Hopkins University



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Abstract

The term “New South” has been used for over a hundred years to describe and categorize the Southern U.S. The desire to continually reinvent the South suggests that the current transformations of the region’s economy, demographics, and politics are not radical reconfigurations of a monolithic and unchanging landscape, but rather are the latest articulations of a complex and continually evolving region. Change in the South, however, is not a neutral, uncontested process. The South’s meaning is now being challenged in ways that have not been witnessed before. Multiethnic diversity has been identified as one of the key emerging features of the region, particularly in job-laden metropolitan areas. In North Carolina and other Southern States, migration streams are channeling Latinos into areas with relatively large Black populations, and in geographically defined social/political spaces that have been historically discussed in binary terms of Black and White. This essay is a preliminary exploration of these processes of contested change in North Carolina, examining the stakes involved, the processes that have unfurled, and the histories/legacies produced by these interactions that are rapidly becoming prominent features in the American social landscape.

Author’s Contact Details

John Jackson Jr., University of Pennsylvania; jackson5@asc.upenn.edu
David Sartorius, University of Maryland, College Park; das@umd.edu
Carlos Tovaes, California State University, Northridge
Bobby Vaughn, Notre Dame de Namur University; bvaughn@ndnu.edu
Ben Vinson III, Johns Hopkins University; bvinson2@jhu.edu

Introduction

African interest in the diaspora has never been greater than it is now. This is evident in the term “New South” has been used for over a hundred years to describe and categorize the Southern U.S.¹ The desire to continually reinvent the South, suggests that the current transformations of the region’s economy, demographics, and politics are not radical reconfigurations of a monolithic and unchanging landscape, but rather are the latest articulations of a complex and continually evolving region. Change in the South, however is not a neutral, uncontested process. The South’s meaning is now being challenged in ways that have not been witnessed before. Multiethnic diversity has been identified as one of the key emerging features of the region, particularly in job-laden metropolitan areas.² In North Carolina and other Southern States, migration streams are channeling Latinos into areas with relatively large Black populations, and in geographically defined social/political spaces that have been historically discussed in binary terms of Black and White. The South has the highest number of African-Americans of any U.S. region and in North Carolina, Blacks were 21.6% of the population in 2000.³ But in the 1990s, North Carolina possessed one of the fastest growing Latino populations in the United States, growing nearly 500% by official estimates.⁴ Latinos currently constitute nearly 5% of the state’s eight million inhabitants, up from 1.2% in 1990.⁵ Indicators suggest that since the 1980s, the Latino population has also become a more permanent presence. Substantial percentages of the nearly 100,000 Latinos who were found annually in North Carolina during the 1980s were migrant farmers, contracted to work the state’s fields primarily in the spring and fall. Many of these temporary laborers were confined to migrant camps, lessening their impact on the state’s culture and social structure. The dramatic improvement in the U.S. economy during the 1990s brought new employment opportunities, marked by openings in factory positions, the

¹ Some early examples are: UNC, *The State University and The New South: Being The Proceedings of The Inauguration of Harry Woodburn Chase As President of the University of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: UNC-Chapel Hill, 1920); Virginius Dabney, *Below the Potomac: A Book About The New South* (New York, & London: D. Appleton-Century, 1942); Sarah McCulloh Lemmon, “Raleigh-An Example of the “New South” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 43 (3) (July 1966); Paul Morton Gaston, *The Concept of the New South, 1865-1900*. (Ph.D. Dissertation, UNC-Chapel Hill, 1955).

² *The State of the South 2002, Shadows in the Sunbelt Revisited*, (Chapel Hill: MDC, 2002).

³ W.H. Frey, “Immigration and Internal Migration ‘Flight’ From US Metropolitan Areas: Toward A New Demographic Balkanization,” *Urban Studies* 32, (1995): 733-757; and U.S. Census Bureau, *North Carolina Fact Sheet 2000*, <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000, Summary File 1.

⁵ Ibid.

service industry, retail and construction. A once migratory population grew increasingly more rooted in the state. North Carolina has not been alone in exhibiting these patterns. Other regions not typically associated with heavy Latino immigration, such as Georgia, Arkansas, and Nevada, have experienced similar trends.⁶

How are Latinos negotiating community building in the South? What has been the impact of multiracial contact in the unique setting of “the South” on the identity of Latinos and Afro-Latinos? Has the influx of Latino immigrants had the effect of “uplifting” African-Americans, or are they negatively impacting their opportunities? Are Latino and African-American communities “natural” allies because of their racialization and because of the predominantly working-class character of both groups or, are they competitors for resources: private sector jobs, private grant money, local government social service spending, and public employment opportunities? The purpose of this article is to examine the nature of contact experienced between African-Americans, Latinos, and Afro-Latinos. To date, much of the research in Latino studies has focused on the struggle of Latinos against Anglo power, and has examined more traditionally understood areas of Latino immigration, such as California, Florida, New York, and Texas. A smaller selection of the literature explores the relationships between Latinos and other minority groups in less traditional areas.⁷ Using ethnographic techniques and

⁶ Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Pérez, “The Research Agenda,” in *Latinos, Remaking America* eds. Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Pérez, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 12.

⁷ Some articles of interest include: Scott Cummings and Thomas Lambert, “Anti-Hispanic and Anti-Asian Sentiments Among African-Americans,” *Social Science Quarterly*, 78, (2) (June 1997): 338-353, J. Diaz-Veizades, and E. Chang, “Building Cross-Cultural Coalitions: a Case Study of the Black – Korean Alliance and the Latino-Black Roundtable,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19, (3) (1996): 680-700, Matthew Dowd, et al. “The Changing Dynamics of Black and Latino Politics,” Forum Event, Institute of Politics, Harvard University. 12 February 2002, *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, 14, (2001-2002): 5-15, Tanya Katerí Hernández, “Too Black to Be Latino/a”: Blackness and Blacks as Foreigners in Latino Studies (Response to Silvio Torres-Saillant),” *Latino Studies*, 1, (1) (Mar 2003): 152-159, K. Kaufmann, “Cracks in the Rainbow: Group Commonality as a Basis for Latino and African-American Political Coalitions,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 56, (2) (June 2003): 199-210, Melissa J. Marschall, “Does the Shoe Fit: Testing Models of Participation for African-American and Latino Involvement in Local Politics,” *Urban Affairs*, 37, (2) (November 2001): 227-248, E. Molina, “Informal Non-Kin Networks Among Homeless Latino and African-American Men: Form and Functions,” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 43, (4) (January 2000): 663-685, Grace A. Rosales, Mona Devich Navarro, and Desdemona Cardosa, “Variation in Attitudes Toward Immigrants Measured Among Latino, African American, Asian, and Euro-American Students,” in *Asian and Latino Immigrants in a Restructuring Economy: the Metamorphosis of Southern California*, eds. Marta Lopez-Garza, David R. Diaz, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 353-367, S. Rosenbloom, and N. Way, “Experiences of Discrimination Among African-American, Asian American, and Latino adolescents in an Urban High School,” *Youth and Society*, 35, (4) (June 2004): 420-451, K. Underwood, “Ethnicity is Not Enough: Latino-Led Multiracial Coalitions in Los Angeles,” *Urban Affairs*, 33, (1) (1997): 3-27, N. Way, K. Cowal, R. Gingold, R., K. Pahl, and N. Bissessar, “Friendship Patterns Among African-American, Asian American, and Latino Adolescents from Low-Income Families,” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 18, (1) (February 2001):

surveying a range of periodicals, including three of North Carolina's main Spanish-language newspapers, this article contributes to the ongoing debate regarding the emerging status of Latinos by examining their place in North Carolina, and the reciprocal effects that Blackness has played on their presence in the region. While still a preliminary study, our findings are suggestive and hope to stimulate deeper discussion on how migration and transnational streams are impacting racial formations in the U.S.

Reading the Latino Press for Black/Brown Relations

After over a decade of serving as an important source of North Carolina's migrant labor, by the middle of the 1990s, Latinos began asserting a more permanent and public presence in the state. The creation of several Spanish-language newspapers and organizations provided testament to the change. The Centro Hispano opened in Durham in 1992. *La Voz del Pueblo* began publication in 1993 in Chapel Hill and, after changing its name to *La Voz de Carolina* one year later, operated until 1999.⁸ *La Conexión*, a Raleigh newspaper, began in 1995, and *La Noticia* began around 1997 in Charlotte.

For the purposes of understanding some of the dimensions of African-American/Latino relations, the Spanish-language press is an illustrative instrument. Articles published here over the past decade have reported (limitedly and perhaps unconsciously) on how the surging Latino presence has brought forth institutional and policy changes that have affected both communities. Some of these have involved shifts in the orientation of state and local institutions that once focused their energies most heavily on Black socio-economic progress and uplift, to increasing

21-53, N. Way and L. Chen, "Close and General Friendships Among African-American, Latino, and Asian American Adolescents from Low-Income Families." *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 15, (2) (March 2000): 274-301. See also: *Black and Multiracial Politics in America*, eds. Yvette M. Alex-Assensoh and Lawrence J. Hanks, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), *Brown and Black Communication: Latino and African-American Conflict and Convergence in Mass Media*, eds. Diana I. Rios and A.N. Mohamed, (Westport: Praeger, 2003), *Latino Workers in the Contemporary South*, eds. by Arthur D. Murphy, Colleen Blanchard, and Jennifer A. Hill, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), *Los Angeles Struggles Toward Multiethnic Community: Asian American, African-American & Latino Perspectives*, eds. by Edward T. Chang & Russell C. Leong, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), *Racial Politics in American Cities*, eds. by Rufus Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, David H. Tabb. 3rd ed. (New York: Longman Publishers, 2003), H. Edward Ransford, *Race and Class in American Society: Black, Latino, Anglo*, 2nd Rev. Ed. (Rochester: Schenkman Books, 1994).

⁸ *La Conexión* reported that Lizette Cruz-Watko, publisher of *La Voz*, handed operations of the newspaper to Charlotte millionaire Andrew Reyes, later suspected of financial improprieties and forced to resign the presidency of the county Democratic party and who disappeared in May 2001. "Mezcla de Emociones en la muerte de La Voz de Carolina," *La Conexión*, 12 November 1999.

their attention on Latinos. The celebratory tone of some articles insinuate that the Latino press welcomed the changes as advancing, and even solidifying their status in state and local affairs. *La Noticia* reported in January 2001 that the Office of Minorities in Mecklenburg County “ceased to be a center for the exclusive attention of the *afroamericana* population” and renamed itself the Office of Diversity [read “minorities” as Blacks and “diversity” as inclusive of Latinos]. The new director, Ahmad Daniels, said that the needs of the county had changed since Bob Walton, a county commissioner, had created the office in the 1980s to respond to the needs of the African-American community. English classes and interpreter training would now be included in the services that the office provided. *La Noticia* applauded the move and took the occasion as a moment to reflect on the deeper meaning of African-American/Latino relations:

Many *afroamericanos* are worried because they think that *los latinos* are taking jobs from them, since they sometimes work more cheaply because they need the work. A study by the North Carolina State University Department of Sociology shows that *afroamericanos* are ascending the economic ladder, occupying positions that had been left to *angloamericanos*, who at the same time have ascended. The study shows that *los latinos* are doing the jobs that nobody wants to do.⁹

Instead of competitive displacement, *La Noticia* stressed the complementary and beneficial aspects of the Latino presence, demonstrating how they were situated into a continually evolving, progressive society. Any institutional changes that sought to better accommodate the Latino presence only served to further demonstrate their “fit” into the state’s socio-economic matrix. *La Noticia* also discussed subtle, but important accommodationist changes within African-American centered organizations that stood outside the realm of government-centered politics. The Ada Jenkins Center, which began in 1937 to support Davidson’s African-American community with its social, medical, and educational programs, hired Margie Marcía Causby, a Puerto Rican woman, to coordinate GED and work training programs, after-school classes, Spanish and English classes, as well as housing and emergency assistance programs for the Latin American community. According to *La Noticia*, the center had closed in 1966 “with the implementation of civil rights and the inclusion of all races in the school system,” but Bonnie Brown, a resident of Davidson, reopened it in 1996 to assist people in Davidson, Mooresville, Cornelius, and Huntersville.

⁹ “Oficina de Minorías de Mecklenburg será Oficina de Diversidad,” *La Noticia*, 19 January 2001, 8.

Into the 1990s, labor issues and conflicts continued to dominate news about the Latin American community; however, a survey of the Spanish-language press reveals that these struggles increasingly revealed instances of cooperation with African-Americans. A photograph of African-Americans distributing flyers accompanied an article in April 1994 about the Workers Want Fairness coalition that organized at Carolina Turkey in Duplin County. The death of Ignacio Henriquez in a meat-grinding machine the previous year raised workers' awareness of the plant's history of health and safety hazards, and *La Voz de Carolina* credited the coalition's protests and demonstrations with the \$904,900 fine levied against Carolina Turkey in May.¹⁰ Articles hailed the successes of UFW- and AFL-CIO-sponsored unionization campaigns in the strawberry fields of California and the subsequent gains made by the Latin American strawberry pickers. Because, the article argued, "civil rights groups know how discrimination against *hispanos* can affect the whole nation," the NAACP, the National Council on Race, and other African-American-led organizations had stood behind the strawberry workers.¹¹ The AFL-CIO had already been making inroads in North Carolina, where the president of the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, Baldemar Velásquez, had visited Mount Olive in 1997 to denounce the anti-union actions of the Mount Olive Pickle Company.¹²

Apart from the labor arena, the Spanish-language press documented churches as spaces of civic cooperation between Latin Americans and longtime residents of North Carolina, including Blacks. *La Conexión* ran an article in 1999 praising a Catholic priest in Wilmington for his many years of service to marginalized communities. Thomas Hadden was the first African-American seminarian in the North American theology school in Rome and, with his ordination in 1958, the first African-American diocesan priest in Raleigh. *La Conexión* celebrated his forty years of reaching out to all nonwhite North Carolinians.¹³ In 1990, a Costa Rican family responded to a door-to-door recruiting drive by the youth of the Free Will Baptist Church in Lincolnton, where they ran a Hispanic ministry until their visas expired. Other Latin Americans picked up where they left off, equipping pews with headphones so that Spanish-speakers could listen as two members translated the service. By 1995, Free Will Baptist had

¹⁰ "Trabajadores de Carolina Turkey Se Organizan y Continúan a Proceder" and "Multan a 'Carolina Turkey' por la Muerte de Un Obrero," *La Voz de Carolina*, March 1994, 3, and May 1994, 3.

¹¹ "Los sindicatos y los hispanos ofrecen sendero para ellos mismos y para la nación," *La Voz de Carolina*, 1-15 February 1997, 10.

¹² "Trabajadores agrícolas de Carolina del Norte piden sindicato laboral," *La Voz de Carolina*, 1-15 June 1997, 1.

¹³ "40 años al servicio de la Iglesia," *La Conexión*, 11 June 1999, 2.

over forty regular members from Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua.¹⁴ In Charlotte, three Baptist churches began a program in 1996 to meet three times each year to “work on projects of intercultural action and interracial cooperation.” The Union Baptist Church in Winston-Salem united with the Hispanic Baptist Church and the Union Grove Baptist Church in Kernersville to begin meeting in the wake of the tragic Black church burnings throughout the South. Their first act raised almost \$1,000 towards reconstructing a decimated church in Charlotte.¹⁵

Not all press coverage detailed interracial harmony. In Durham, church-based cooperation faltered when Holy Cross Catholic Church [a traditionally Black church] canceled the city’s only Spanish-language mass in 1996. “The church council’s resolution is ineffective and racist,” claimed an anonymous Latino community leader. Latin Americans throughout the Triangle demonstrated in front of the church holding a banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Pastor David Barry explained that the church hoped “that the Hispanic community would integrate itself into English services,” but local Latino leaders—independent of church members—took the opportunity to demand a greater voice in civic affairs.¹⁶ The press also cataloged instances of violent crime against Latinos, perpetrated by Blacks. When two young African-American men attacked El Salvadoran Carlos Mario Jiménez in Durham in 1997, *La Voz de Carolina* ran articles on the police department’s response in creating a Hispanic Outreach Intervention Strategy Team (HOIST) to prevent violence targeted against Latin Americans.¹⁷ *La Voz de Carolina* also covered an assault in Winston-Salem in 1998 where a group of African-Americans attacked a group of Latin Americans who had arrived at the La Samaritana shelter. According to eyewitnesses, “the *afroamericanos* who have committed this type of act have signed their intention to get rid of the *hispanos* that live in the area.” The journalist extended the racial implications of the incident: “Once Martin Luther King fought for the human rights of his own race; now they think they are untouchable.”¹⁸

In contrast to these negative episodes, the Spanish-language press’s coverage of civic associations and clubs revealed a number of limited attempts at cooperation and interactivity

¹⁴ “FloreCIMIENTO del ministro hispano en Lincolnton,” *La Voz de Carolina*, February 1995, 3.

¹⁵ “Iglesias locales se unen para la oración y el desarrollo interracial,” *La Voz de Carolina*, 16-28 February 1997, 6.

¹⁶ “Cancelan única misa en español en Durham,” *La Voz de Carolina*, October 1996, 7.

¹⁷ “Continúa el crimen contra los latinos en Durham” and “Durham crea programa para la intervención de crímenes contra hispanos,” *La Voz de Carolina*, 1-15 July 1997 and 9 February 1998, 1.

¹⁸ “Persisten los problemas raciales,” *La Voz de Carolina*, 19 March 1998, 5.

between African-Americans and Latinos that extended beyond the workplace. In 1999, for example, the Wake County League of Women Voters and the YWCA invited women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds to participate in Study Circles—discussion groups that focused on race relations. They intended to “share racial experiences, understanding where racism comes from, what can be done to diminish racism, and what can be done to improve race relations among the family.” The organizations, however, asked for only five to ten participants from each “ethnic group,” thus limiting the number of women who benefited from these therapeutic politics and, ultimately, limiting the effects of the exercise on the social world of the participants.¹⁹ In Charlotte, existing African-American and Latino organizations have worked together to look for solutions to the specific social problems affecting each of their communities. The Urban League organized a roundtable with Latino leaders in October 2001. On being named director of Charlotte’s Coalición Latinoamericana in March 2001, Salvadoran Manuel Antonio Mendoza pledged to “develop a program that opens the possibilities of uniting as much with *angloamericanos* as with *afroamericanos* to help each other.”²⁰ In November 2001, Rev. James Barnett, director and founder of Stop the Killing, formed the Alto al Asesinato alliance with Maudia Meléndez of the Conexión Latina. The new alliance, which sought to “prevent the proliferation of murders and delinquency and foster understanding between the Latino and African-American communities,” grew out of the Stop the Killing organization that Barnett created nearly ten years earlier after he had visited Nicaragua and seen Alto al Asesinato groups effectively decreasing violence in Miskito indigenous communities on the Atlantic coast. Given that one of four murder victims in Mecklenburg County was Latino, Meléndez explained, “Our main goal is to minimize crime, to educate, and to raise consciousness. We shouldn’t generalize, nor accuse other communities, since each one has its own problems.”²¹ In December 2001, Alto al Asesinato organized a one thousand-person march through Charlotte, attended by Mayor Pat McCrory, Congressmen Mel Watt, and a representative of the police international relations unit.

¹⁹ “Mujeres de Wake, NC, promueven relaciones interracial,” *La Voz de Carolina*, 8 April 1999, 14. On the phenomenon of such encounter groups, see Elizabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Race Experts: How Racial Etiquette, Sensitivity Training, and New Age Therapy Hijacked the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Norton, 2001), Ch. 3.

²⁰ “Nombran a salvadoreño como director ejecutivo de La Coalición Latinoamericana,” *La Noticia*, 9 March 2001, 26. On the Council, see Rudolfo Figueroa-Aramoni, “A Nation Beyond Its Borders: The Program for Mexican Communities Abroad,” *Journal of American History* 86:2 (1999): 537-544.

²¹ “Reunión entre líderes latinos y afroamericanos” and “¡Alto al asesinato!” *La Noticia*, 19 October 2001, 36, and 9 November 2001, 1. The Alto al Asesinato alliance also had the support of Mexicanos Unidos 5 de Mayo, Hondureños Unidos, and the Unión Salvadoreña (UNISAL), the international relations unit of the police department, and local politicians James Mitchell, Jr., Malcolm Graham, Norman Mitchell, and Robbie Harrison.

Luis Rivera, a young representative of local metalworkers, spoke at the march to his “*hermanos mexicanos, hondureños, salvadoreños, colombianos*”: “Our *hermanos afroamericanos* already have their rights and are also battling to end, so that we, too, have to take the step.” James Barnett put the issue more bluntly: “Latinos across the country have been killed and nobody does anything about it, and the same thing happens to African-Americans.”²² Interestingly, the language employed by Bennett and Rivera in their speeches speak volumes about different understandings of the contours of multi-ethnic alliances. Barnett exemplified how many North Carolinians, with entrenched notions of race, exhibit a tendency towards identifying individuals racially. To look for Latino allies in civic life implies that “Latinos” comprise a coherent cultural and social group. Rivera, against the grain of the ubiquitous language of “African-American/Latino” cooperation at the rally, eschewed the Latino category and instead identified his audience by their diverse national identities. Simultaneously, he recognized the exigencies of aligning with other segments of the population confronting similar social problems. His comments, like those of many Latinos in North Carolina, differentiate the challenges Latinos face from those of African-Americans by the somewhat overstated “success” of Black-white relations in North Carolina. As racial politics, African-American struggles may offer a model and inspiration to Latinos, but they contrast to the challenges of an “incompletely racialized group” as it navigates its social, political, and cultural trajectory in an environment prone to viewing the world through the lens of race.²³

Building Fragile Alliances

While a quick survey of the Spanish language press does document a number of successful efforts of collaboration between Blacks and Latinos, we maintain in this article that there tends to be a two-track system of Black/Latino interaction—a path of “enlightened non-engagement,” and a path of “dedicated interactivity.” Enlightened non-engagement simply refers to situations where Blacks and Latinos demonstrate knowledge of and sympathy with each other’s experiences; however, that awareness does not translate into strategies for close collaboration. Sometimes, even the desire for collaboration is absent. Enlightened non-

²² “Latinos y afroamericanos marchan unidos por un rotundo NO a la violencia,” *La Noticia*, 14 December, 2001, 30.

²³ Lawrence Blum, “*I’m Not a Racist, But . . .*”: *The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 151-155.

engagement has been evident in Latino and African-American circles at the local, state, and national levels. On the other hand, “dedicated interactivity” refers to sustained instances of cross-racial and cross-ethnic contact that result in shared efforts to address the needs of both Blacks and Latinos, often with concrete policy ramifications and interventions.

Over the years, leaders of African-American organizations have repeatedly voiced the need to increasingly connect with Latinos. For example, when Ben Chavis assumed leadership of the NAACP in 1993, he stated that he would work to make it more inclusive of Latinos, particularly those who identified as Black. Similarly, Hugh Price, the past president of the National Urban League, stated that he hoped to expand his organization’s services and programs to include both Latinos and other ethnic communities. The National Urban League (NUL) affiliate in the Triangle is one of the newest chapters and was promoted by Price as a new, cross-racial model for NUL programs. But the actual implementation of Black outreach projects to Latinos seems slow and hesitant. Even in the NAACP, since Ben Chavis’ departure, the theme of working more closely with Latinos has seemingly faded.²⁴ At the local level, North Carolina’s NAACP chapters support alliances with Latinos on record, but do not appear to be committed to following through, as evidenced by the lack of specific outreach programs.²⁵ Similarly, despite its inclusionary rhetoric, the local National Urban League’s affiliate in the Triangle (although still in its early phases of development) does not feature Latinos prominently as an aspect of the group’s promotional literature, nor do their board members reflect any strong incorporation of Latinos.²⁶

Similar statements can be made about numerous Latino organizations, particularly several of the new non-profit advocacy groups that have emerged in North Carolina over recent years. Among a group of politically engaged, middle-class Latino immigrants (who form a core leadership group in several parts of the state) there are efforts of community formation that focus on networking and mobilizing Latinos on issues directly impacting their community, especially

²⁴ Ben Chavis’s tenure at the NAACP was short. He resigned in 1995 after allegations of the misappropriation of funds and charges of a romantic relationship with a staff member. There was also controversy about his connections to the Nation of Islam.

²⁵ NAACP Today. NBC 17, Raleigh, North Carolina. 2003.

²⁶ Interestingly, the Triangle affiliate is not listed in the National Urban League’s web site’s listing of local organizations throughout the nation. However, the group does exist and produced a report in 2003 on the Black community in the Research Triangle area. The report, *The State of the Black Triangle* is available at www.triangleul.org/SBT.pdf. The activities of the NUL in the Triangle might be compared to the activities of the chapter in Charlotte, and its 2001 meeting with Latino leaders.

immigration. These efforts rarely embrace Blacks as co-strategists and partners, despite recognizing the possible benefits that could be obtained from such partnering. In general, these middle-class Latino immigrants are not racist towards African-Americans and if asked about working with them they frequently state that it is a good idea, but some feel that the issues they support do not always generate Black enthusiasm. In conversations with a director of a Latino non-profit who was asked if the organization had any ongoing programs that collaborated with African-American groups, the answer was no. When asked if the Latino group was interested in collaborating with an African-American organization, the response was yes, provided that another organization would fund such a project. Seeking out African-American collaborators was not a high priority.²⁷

Non-engagement with African-Americans can also be detected by their absence in planning and implementing statewide, Latino non-profit sector events, such as El Pueblo's annual policy issues conference (known as El Foro) that attracts attendants from all parts of North Carolina. Conference sessions cover a wide range of topics, including education, health care, and media relations. A few Black elected officials are usually invited as guests and panelists; however, established Black organizations, such as the NAACP and the National Urban League are not a presence. Neither is the theme of Black-Latino relations the subject of breakout sessions.

To be fair, Latino organizations, such as the Triangle's El Pueblo, are non-profits of modest size that rely heavily on volunteers and part-time staff. El Pueblo is a large organization compared to other local projects, such as Carrboro's El Centro Latino, which has just two or three paid staff members. For the most part, Latino non-profits work under incredibly difficult circumstances and not surprisingly, tend to limit and focus their efforts in order to maximize their effectiveness. Our aim here is not to criticize these advocacy groups, but rather to analyze the racial dimensions of projects of Latino community formation.

It is clear that we should not assume that because both African-Americans and Latinos are racialized groups that there should be alliances between them. Such a view is simplistic and ignores the complexities of race and social relations in the U.S and the local specificities of communities. Latino activists operating statewide tend to focus on lobbying efforts aimed at impacting legislation and policy, more than engaging in grassroots politics. In pressing their

²⁷ Interview conducted by Carlos Tovares, September 2003. The interviewee has requested to remain anonymous.

issues, such as fighting efforts to revoke the ability of undocumented people to obtain a driver's license, lobbying to promote in-state tuition rates for undocumented students, and immigration reform (amnesty and guest worker programs), Latino activists are not focused on building coalitions with African-Americans, rather they are concerned with mobilizing Latinos and on gaining and maintaining access to decision-makers, who are primarily White.

Many North Carolina Latinos involved in advocacy have celebrated the spectacular growth of the Latino population in the state because it makes their lobbying efforts more compelling. However, some Latinos, including one who has been active in Democratic Party politics, stated that the celebratory proclamations have been disturbing because they suggest that Latinos and Blacks are in competition for attention and resources.²⁸ He also stated that the emphasis on the plight of undocumented people, and the seeming abandonment of the affirmative action cause by Latinos, has been disconcerting. He understands the alienating effect to Blacks that these positions promote. Furthermore, the lack of energy for affirmative action has been coupled with a push to promote in-state tuition for undocumented residents. This move comes precisely at a time when African-American access to higher education appears to be shrinking. Atop that, Blacks perceive that they are being asked to underwrite the costs of educating undocumented students through their taxes. These have not been popular positions. The informant stated that he considered himself an American, and that he cares about all Americans, not just immigrants. His words reflect a concern among a certain segment of the non-immigrant Latino population. Focusing on immigrant issues, and particularly the issues of undocumented workers, should not be the main "face" of Latino politics in the South.

Indeed, it is the U.S. born segment of the Latino activist community, particularly those involved in electoral politics, which has been more insistent than others in signaling collaboration with African-Americans as a central and integral element of their activism. Accompanying them is a small segment of the recent Latino immigrant community that has a background in grassroots activism. One of their most significant activities in the Triangle area has been involvement in the formation of a multi-racial community group, called Durham Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods (CAN). Durham CAN is an initiative of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), an organization that has been promoting local grassroots

²⁸ Interview conducted by Carlos Tovares, September 2003. The interviewee has requested to remain anonymous.

activism for decades. The Durham group was formally formed in May of 2001.²⁹ The model of the IAF is to work through existing organizations, such as churches and neighborhood groups. Durham CAN is an alliance of churches from several denominations, a citizens group, The People's Alliance, and El Centro Hispano, a social service organization for Latinos. IAF organizations tend to focus on local issues. At the October 10, 2002 meeting (to which candidates for local elected offices were invited) CAN members articulated their key issues, including lead poisoning, a living wage ordinance, increased funding for after-school programs, and more housing inspectors. Several Latinos, including Ivan Parra, who was instrumental in the formation of Durham's El Centro Hispano, are involved in Durham CAN. Currently, the IAF is funding similar working-class, multiracial community organizations in at least three other communities, including Winston-Salem, Raleigh, and the Chapel Hill/Carrboro area. Parra also has a newer, separate project, developing a statewide grassroots Latino advocacy group. In part because of his background with a multiracial grassroots effort (Durham CAN), Parra's new program, The Latino Community Development Center, offers the potential to institutionalize Latino collaboration with African-Americans and with a wide range of growing immigrant groups across the state. The Latino Community Development Center is based in Durham, a city that Parra sees as the most receptive in North Carolina for collaboration between Latinos and African-Americans.³⁰

As the Latino community continues to grow in North Carolina, it remains open to question how and to what extent their relations with the African-American community will intensify. It may be that parallel strategies of "enlightened non-engagement" will grow and foster a deeper distance between the two populations. Or it may be that as the non-immigrant Latino population increases, deeper levels of interactivity will emerge. In either case, the future of race relations between both groups may have much to do with where they envision themselves in the "South." If the region is ever able to successfully overcome its image as an arena

²⁹ Claudia Assis, "New Group Pushes Housing, Education," *The Durham Herald-Sun*, 4 May 2001; Ben Evans, "New Durham Political Group Cheers Council Members' Responses," *The Durham Herald-Sun*, 26 April 2002; and Jennifer Strom, "Building Blocs: Think Political Power Is Reserved For The Well-Heeled And Well-Connected? A New Grassroots Group In Durham Wants You To Think Again," *The Independent*, 16 January 2002.

³⁰ The comment was made at a screening and discussion at UNC Chapel Hill of the documentary films *El Otro Lado* and *Nuestra Comunidad*. November 21, 2002. Note that Durham CAN and Parra's efforts are not the only collaborative efforts in the Triangle area, nor are we insinuating that the individuals involved in these projects represent the extent of African-American/Latino coalitions. Latino activists in the Triangle such as John Herrera at El Centro Hispano and Mauricio Castro, a member of the board of directors at El Centro Latino in Carrboro are just a couple of others who share the same vision and mission.

primarily of binary, racial relations, to a more multi-ethnic environment, and if both groups have a part in articulating that change, then substantive collaborations may result. Nevertheless, as Manuel Castells' (1983) analysis of Latino politics in San Francisco's Mission District highlighted, alliances among just one racial group are difficult to maintain.³¹ Any meaningful alliance between North Carolina's Latinos and African-Americans that may emerge from the preliminary interactions found currently within the state is inevitably fraught with pitfalls. Will all the local organizations be able to successfully negotiate racial tensions? Will alliances be successful only through focusing on very specific, local issues? Will these local groups be able to coalesce into political force at the state level?

Black Like Me: African-American Interpretations of North Carolina's Latino Presence

In the first section of this article, we had several specific goals. First, we tried to highlight some general contours of the demographic shift that characterizes America's most recent iteration of the "New South." We believe that North Carolina is representative of this newest "New South" and, therefore, a particularly important space for rethinking race, ethnicity, international migration and global capitalism in the 21st century. The American South (especially the Southeast) is often overly provincialized in contemporary popular and academic discussions. Our collective commonsense takes it for granted. In discussions about transnationalism and globalization, people imagine places like New York, London, Tokyo, and Paris to better stand-in for globality and its concomitant internationalizations of local space. Cities like Durham, North Carolina, are imagined to be trapped in the genteel past—still rural, still local, still stuck in its own bifurcated and Jim-Crowed regional specificity, still simply Black and White. Recent statistics on Latino in-migration belie this nostalgic assumption, and so the first section examined, in broad strokes, several of the mechanisms by which Spanish-speaking migrants are being incorporated into the workforce, into grassroots organizations, into religious life, and into North Carolina's larger body politic.

With those themes as backdrop, we also used the first part of this article to convey a sense of how African-American elected officials and political leaders are negotiating the choppy waters of cross-ethnic conflict and collaboration. Constantly monitored and quoted by the press, this political leadership may have less of an incentive to speak frankly about such issues than do

³¹ Manuel Castells, *The City and the Grassroots* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

their more rank-and-file race-mates (whose opinions are less frequently sought). So we wanted to use this second section to examine what local African-American North Carolinians actually think about Latinos, Latino in-migration, and African-American/Latino relations more generally. This section is labeled, “Black Like Me?,” which is meant to highlight the tellingly ambivalent comparisons and contrasts our interviewees drew between African-Americans and their Latino neighbors in Durham.³²

Several respondents interestingly theorized contemporary Latino culture and politics as analogous to pre-Civil Rights Era African-American life. In terms of civic power, organizational techniques, and activist impact, many African-American Durhamites claim that Latinos today are where black people were a couple of generations ago. Barry, a 22 year-old college graduate and middle-school teacher at a majority-minority Durham public school, stated this position most directly. “I don’t see us cleaning houses as much as them,” he says. “They seem to be us two generations ago. Where it was basically the black man doing whatever he could do with his hands to bring some paper home, and the woman cleaning white people’s houses or whatever houses. They seem to be doing that now. And we seem to be in jail.”

A native North Carolinian, Barry can trace his local familial roots back to the nineteenth century. As a teenager, he spent several years in Washington D.C., a place that he considers “much more diverse” than his North Carolina neighborhood (“forty different languages” were spoken in his Washington D.C. high school). However, he does realize that his beloved North Carolina also has some diversity—“blacks, whites, Hispanics, a couple Middle Easterners and Asians” is how Barry puts it. He sees contemporary Latinos as just like African-Americans—at least, just like African-Americans were “two generations ago.” Barry is not alone.

Ralph, 31, was raised in “a working African-American middle class family” in Lewisburg, North Carolina. Ralph’s wife is bi-racial, which means, he claims, that “her calling in life is to bridge racial gaps.” He loves that about her. A generous and open-minded person, Ralph thinks very carefully before he answers any serious questions, and he mirrors Barry’s analysis almost exactly. “Where they [Latinos] are now is where I would consider where we were in the 1950s and 60s,” Ralph says. “And this is actually stuff that I’ve thought about. Their

³² In order to examine African-American/Latino relations in contemporary Durham, North Carolina, we conducted 10 in-depth interviews with African-American Durhamites during the summer of 2003, specifically asking them questions about the extent of cross-ethnic interactions in their community. The interviewees were both men and women—and ranged in age from 22-59. Each interview was tape-recorded on audiocassette (with two of them also videotaped on mini-DV) for a future documentary project.

leadership is very thin on the top, but very talented. And then there's a gap. And my concern is that if those individuals disappear then you lose your ability to push forward particular political agendas. And that's where we were in the 50s and 60s. And in some respect, where we still are. And we still are very individually led." Ralph also places Latinos in a kind of cryogenic African-American past, even though he also ultimately admits that African-Americans themselves may not have progressed all that far from that older "individually led" Civil Rights model of community and social leadership.

Sheila, 42 years old, was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, and raised in Durham. She grew up as an air-force brat. Her family settled in North Carolina when she started elementary school, at which point they stopped moving. Her parents wanted stability in their young daughter's life. Growing up, she says, they were "always the first black family in a neighborhood," not living in a predominantly Africa-American community until well after she started high school. Sheila describes Latinos as relative newcomers to her social neighborhood, but she has already noticed some interesting similarities between them and African-Americans, similarities that mirror the kinds of comparisons made by Barry and Ralph:

Sheila: Another thing about the Latino experience that's fun to me, its like a repeat of history that's related to African-American leaderships, where you have that elite group of black people who could always vote, and who often could pass, and have that education, who kind of dictated to the other black people that it's not time yet for that [revolutionary politics]. We gotta wait on that. And let Big Poppa come and take care of that. I'm watching that [with Latinos]. There was a Triangle Urban League meeting where one of the Latinos got up and made jokes about the number, like there was a table full of Latinos and he made a joke about how they're all packed around one table or something like that. I was like, oh man, that's what we did in the 50s. Trying to make white folks comfortable. So I'm imagining in ten years, maybe twenty-five years, that you're gonna see a Latino Civil Rights Action happening.

Barry, Ralph, and Sheila showcase an interesting maneuver among the African-Americans that we interviewed in Durham. For all three respondents, Latinos represent African-America's past, a gesture that denies a kind of mutual coevalness and places African-Americans farther along the ladder of social and political progress—from outgrowing the need to clean "white people's houses" to no longer feeling like they have "to make white folks comfortable." This move to place contemporary Latino's in an earlier point within African-America's historical trajectory may do an interesting kind of double-duty. First, it can provide a perch from which to create

social solidarity across ethnic differences (see, they are just like us, or, at least, just like we were). However, it can also be a potentially distancing tactic, especially if the pastness of contemporary Latinos can be chalked up to a naiveté that African-Americans can be said to have evolved beyond. In either case, the cultural differences between Latinos and African-Americans are often posited as a kind of temporal distance between a past and present black experience in the United States.

Another thread that connected African-American respondents' cross-ethnic comparisons was predicated on their assessments of unity/disunity within the Latino community. Some found Latinos to be a unified and cohesive social group. Others described them as splintered by national differences and, therefore, irredeemably suspicious of one another. In both instances, these characteristics were implicitly or explicitly related to the degrees of solidarity to be found in contemporary African-American communities.

Daren is a 27-year old Durham native who obtained his undergraduate degree from Howard University in 1998, burned-out as an accountant after graduate school at UNC-Greensboro a few years later, and now teaches 8th-grader mathematics at an urban school in Durham. His mom is a nurse's aid; his stepfather drives an 18-wheeler, and Daren is the first person in his family to go to college. He admits that he went into education "because he only saw one black man teaching" at his local middle school, and so Daren wanted to have a "positive influence" on young black kids. He has two little brothers, and he says that they have absolutely no black male role-models in school.

Daren spent the first ten-years of his life with his grandmother in a "drug-filled, crime-ridden" housing project complex that "wasn't very diverse. At that point in time, the Latinos hadn't immigrated as much as they have now, so it was 99.9% black. There may have been a white person here or there." Since then, however, Daren has noticed that quite a few Latinos are moving into his neighborhood. As he watches them interact with one another, Daren seems to envy their social community:

Daren: They're group-oriented. And you'll see them, and it'll be fifteen of them in one place. And it's rare (maybe we just don't see this) to see the arguments and all the other stuff. They pool their money. They get one car. They all use one car. You go by certain houses, you see twelve guys get into a pick-up truck and you go "wow!" And they never bicker, and they go to work. And you see them coming back from work...I like the way they do that...Growing up in America where we're very individualistic. I get mine, you

get yours. It's not reaching back. And I know in our community, we get mad: 'You owe me five dollars.' And that's it.

Daren sees Latinos as less fissured by American individualism than African-Americans, but his unified and non-bickering image of Latinos is challenged by other local African-Americans we talked to who claimed to see some very stark and serious conflicts within the Latino community:

Shiela: I made an error in that the first Latina that I hired to work with me was Cuban. And I did not understand that there was distrust of Cubans in many of the other Latin cultures. So she had a hard time working with the community because she was basically discriminating against people. Her prejudice against Mexicans was interfering with my ability to work with that community... We had a situation where a number of predominantly Mexican immigrants were living in just abhorrent conditions by a landlord who owns over 1500 units in Durham. And 90% of them are Latino. That doesn't happen by accident. And charging people to come out if they complained about the housing condition, he would charge them \$35 to come out and look at it. And they stopped complaining, because they couldn't afford it. Because he would come out, but he wouldn't make any repairs. So then he didn't make the repairs; the conditions got worse... It's not what he would do in a black home or in a white apartment. He was charging them late fees that were not lawful. And then he was threatening that if you don't like it, I'll turn you in to the INS.

Sheila sees significant differences between Latinos, differences that problematize their attempts at solidarity and community. According to Sheila, "[t]here's a lot of prejudice... the Puerto Ricans are angry, because they're always being carded when they're citizens. And they feel that they are unjustly painted with the same brush as Mexicans, as being undocumented when they're full citizens." Such inconveniences and humiliations, she says, help to explain why there is tension within the Latino community today. Moreover, there are some very real economic differences between communities that many African-Americans say exacerbate these tensions.

Dina is a 34 year-old actress who was born and raised in Wilmington, North Carolina, with her dad's family and her grandmother. She lived there until she was six; then they moved to "the country" with her mom, relocating farther and farther out of the city just about every single year. She went to Catholic schools with black nuns from the West Indies whose accents and black robes made her imagine them as witches. Today, when she visits friends in New York City, she feels familiar around Caribbeans, and she also notes that pedestrians regularly mistake her for a Dominican woman, hailing her in Spanish along the sidewalk. However, she never

experiences such assessments in the Durham community where she now lives, and this difference, she says, is predicated on differences in national migration patterns from Latin America to various regions of the United States. Moreover, according to Dina, these same national differences map neatly onto economic hierarchies within Durham's Latino community, hierarchies that help to explain some of the conflicts and disunity she sees among Latinos:

Dina: If you're Mexican, your status is considered lower. If you're Guatemalan you're really at the bottom...If you look at the businesses here that are owned by the Latino community, they're really not Mexicans. You look at the non-profit people here, El Pueblo, the Latino credit union, El Centro Hispano, they're not Mexican. It's Puerto Rican or Ecuadorian, or something along that. They say the darker you are, the more connected you are to the native communities—then you're lower ranked and stuff like that. Or Argentinean's do well, but they have that strong Italian influence....Everybody's just trying to cling to their nationality.

Ralph's experiences seem to corroborate Dina's impressions about national differences and social hierarchies within the Latino community:

Ralph: I saw that quite a bit when I worked with the governor's office, when you saw the majority of the population is more Mexican-Hispanic in nature; however, that upper echelon of leadership is not. They're from Cuba. They're from Puerto Rico. And they're normally the more fair-skinned. The people that you say, yeah, they're not white, but they might be white. So just from a physical standpoint, when you look at them they seem very European in nature. And from what I saw, there are some differences in them. That's actually the same thing in the black community, too.

Again, Ralph wants to draw comparisons between “the black community” (this time in the present) and the Latino community, specifically in terms of skin-color prejudices. He contends that the Mexican migrants in North Carolina tend to be darker-skinned than Cubans and Puerto Ricans, and this difference dovetails quite seamlessly with the socioeconomic and professional differences he finds within the Latino community. Contrary to some ubiquitous and commonsensical assumptions, the African-Americans we spoke to did not simply see some monolithic Latino block. Instead, they recognized intra-ethnic distinctions—and even proffered theories about the potential causes and consequences of those differences.

For the majority of African-Americans we interviewed, inter-ethnic violence stood out (even more than language barriers) as the largest stumbling block between the two groups. For

many, violence (particularly gang violence) is mobilized as the foundational idiom for explaining cross-ethnic tensions in local communities. People have explicit examples of such violence, as well as sociological and historical mechanisms for explaining its ostensible rise over the last several years.

Lisa is a 59-year-old former dancer who now runs a community group in downtown Durham. She was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, and moved to Durham over twenty years ago to attend college. She has watched the area change in big and small ways over the last two decades, and an escalation in street violence is one of the defining aspects of that change:

Lisa: Different folks both here and other parts of the South were talking about the hostilities emerging with Latino immigrants, mostly Mexicans, and black folk. And those of us who were here in North Carolina, like here in Durham in '97, one summer, there were like 13 murders of Latinos. Three of them on my block. By African-Americans. And, you know, there were rapes. People knew that there were lots of houses that men were in. And then families came. And folks were carrying cash. Folks knew it. They were in a high-crime neighborhood, so they were an easy target. But some of it was some of the gruesome stuff. Break-in, rape, murder, and take their money. It wasn't just the cash stuff. So that was one layer of it.

Black-on-Latino violence exploded, and more than once, on Lisa's very block—and included rapes, home invasions, murder and robbery. Many local Durhamites talk about this history of violence in ways that are strikingly similar to Lisa's description of things. Sheila, for one, describes Latinos being preyed upon by African-American gangs as a function of several related behavioral traits:

Sheila: Mexicans fear us. They think of us as savages. They have bought into all of the stereotypes of African-Americans. Because they live in such close proximity, the crime that they experience has been predominantly by African-Americans, reinforcing the stereotypes of us as criminals. There have been a number of home invasions, because they keep so much cash. And they're in communities where you have a lot of addicted persons. And their homes are like banks. You just got in and get \$1000, \$2000 in one day. So their experience reinforces the preconceived notions of our community. And they don't necessarily see the broader pieces. And they don't have a lot of experience.

According to many of the informants we spoke with, black-on-Latino violence in the mid-1990s translated into Latino violence in the 21st century, if for no other initial reason than an over compensational self-defense. "I see why there is a big problem with Latino gangs," Ralph says,

“and it’s only going to get worse. I see why there is a lot of distrust.” According to Barry, intra-ethnic differences matter with respect to this issue, too. “Salvadorians, they like niggers,” he explains. “They don’t be playing, for real.” Like many others, Dina thinks that this violence is spinning out of control. “I think there needs to be some things happening,” she says, “or it’s going to be similar to how it is in California with there being a separation...And the Latino gangs are ruthless.” Mike, a police social worker who lives in Durham but works in Chapel Hill, makes even more of the California gang comparison:

Mike: There’s a significant gang problem in Durham and in Chapel Hill. Gangs are... formally recognized gangs in this area and in Chapel Hill within the last five years. I was seeing gangs fifteen years ago here in Chapel Hill. Durham has long recognized they have a Blood-Crip problem. But, Latino gangs are bringing a whole new twist to the way of business as we knew it.... With the Latino gangs, they’re much smaller, they’re more de-centralized, and they are aligning across the Blood- Crip traditional lines. So, Serrano 13 in California may align Crip, but in Durham, they align Blood. The other thing is, if you believe in conspiracy theories... which I may or may not... We shipped a problem out of the United States, into a civil war, particularly in El Salvador, and this is me, this is Mike speaking, into a civil war and we created a much meaner gangster than we’ve ever seen in Chapel Hill or Durham, North Carolina. The folks coming out of Latin America, the gangsters are trained in execution slayings, their fire power is stronger because they’ve been using military rifles, and are well trained in military strategies, military tactics, and they’re running the Bloods and the Crips off the street. The Bloods and the Crips can be bad, but... Serrano 13, Nuestra Familia, Vatos Locos, they are changing the face of the urban gang scene.

This discourse on Latino gangland ruthlessness, and its birth in a collective response to earlier African-American gang-based violence (and, according to Mike, even American foreign policy), is the most prevalent local discourse on the importance of African-American/Latino rapprochement. Violence is used to explain the schisms and to justify a concerted effort at lessening that rift—for the sake of every neighborhood’s safety.

There are two last major obstacles to cross-ethnic community that African-Americans offered, obstacles that help to flesh-out a richer portrait of cross-ethnic conflict in North Carolina. First, there seems to be broad consensus among respondents on the fact that there is a mountainous degree of racial stereotyping that clouds either group’s ability to see the other’s humanity. These stereotypes (like Sheila’s idea that home-invasions reinforced Latino

assumptions about African-American savagery) are constantly circulated within both social groups:

Daren: I've had buddies. You know, the whole stereotypical names, the whole wetback, all the Mexicans in the car....And I don't laugh at those jokes. But I've never been in a situation where I'm with my partner, and we see a Hispanic and he starts picking on him. It's always in conversation. Or seeing some on television. 'Yeah, man, I saw like twenty of them packed in a truck. Or down the street, I see like twenty of them over in that house.' Just those comments, those stereotypical comments, which may lead to your actions being prejudiced or discriminatory.

Daren distinguishes between stereotypes that are used to mock people to their faces versus the kinds that get shared among friends within the intimacy of their own social bonding. But as Daren makes clear, both instances have potentially deleterious effects. Similarly, Boyd sees stereotyping among African-Americans as a disturbingly common occurrence—and only understandable within the context of economic competition:

Boyd: Blacks are always prejudiced against Latinos. Guys are always hearing that they're taking jobs from us. 'The job I do, I can't get nobody to pay me the way they're supposed to pay me because Hispanics will take it for five or ten dollars cheaper. I mean you hear more comments than you do actual actions...But the guys I know who actually employ people, they'll trade-in the Civil Rights Movement to hire a Hispanic, cause that's all they talk about is how hard they work, not paying the taxes, and they'll ride around in the back of a truck with no air or heat.'

This competition for jobs becomes a very important lens for viewing inter-ethnic hostility and mistrust, and many of the respondents made strikingly similar connections between stereotyping and occupational uncertainty. Dina used a specific example, from a local Durham hotel, to explain just where this mistrust and anger comes from, even if she thinks it is ultimately misplaced:

Dina: [Let me tell you] what I've heard, and even what I've seen, when I used to work, for example, at the Washington Duke Inn. I used to work at the front desk. I think a lot of black people are upset because they think the Latino community is taking their jobs. And I understand it to a certain degree, as to why certain people feel that way, but the fight that's going on is with the wrong people. For instance, at that hotel, the manager was white, and all the staff that worked in housekeeping was black, okay. That place was paying less money than some of these other not-so-high-class hotels were paying to the

hotel staff. The housekeeping staff got together and wanted to meet with the general manager to say we would like the same salaries that everybody else is making...and so slowly but surely, it started happening while I was there, there were reasons, stupid reasons that never mattered before, to fire black people from their positions...and so it started turning over. And they last time I was over there I didn't notice a black person...Everyone's Spanish and they didn't have to raise the salary.

As Dina explains it, stereotyping and concomitant cross-ethnic animosity are predicated upon very real labor competition within the low-end labor market. Moreover, she uses her Washington Duke example to argue that this is not simply the innocent outcome of color-blind market forces. Crafty employers, she claims, actually play both sides against one another to keep real wages and employee organization low. According to Dina's reading of the situation, which is indisputably Marxist in many ways, workers of color are being duped into hating one another and blaming each other for what has been caused by much larger macro-structural forces.

Part of the reason why there is such micro-level finger-pointing across ethnic lines may be a direct result of the fact that there seems to be very little serious contact between African-Americans and Latinos in Durham. All of the African-Americans we interviewed maintained that they had no substantive interpersonal contact with Latinos in their everyday lives—even those respondents who were clearly invested in improving African-American/Latino relations at the abstract level and/or worked with Latinos on the job. Most agreed that Latinos “stick to themselves,” but they also had slightly different explanations for the lack of close contact across ethnic lines:

Daren: I coach football. There are no Latinos on the football team. See, I'm not a very social person. I guess you're getting that. I can't do it. There's a custodian here. And I see him. I'm the last person who leaves every night. Cause I gotta clean up the locker room. And I see him. And I apologize to him every night because he wants to turn the alarm on. And every now and then I try to speak some Spanish. And he'll laugh at me. And I'll just do a thumbs up and say, 'hey it's good. I'm about to leave.' It's not a real conversation. It's me trying to show him that I appreciate him. He lets me stay late. 'Thank you.' And that's about the extent of the interaction right there.

Just as Daren cannot have a real conversation with his co-worker, Boyd maintains that intimate relationships are informally outlawed by Latinos. “Not in Carolina,” he says. “Them dudes will kill them [Puerto Rican women]. The Hispanic dudes will kill them [if they tried to date black

guys].” Ralph concedes that he knows some Latinos, but he does not know them nearly well enough:

Ralph: There are very few Latinos in my circle. We do know of some Latino/Hispanic folk, but on a personal basis, who I hang with, who I hang out with after work, those relationships haven’t gotten to the point where we’re reaching out and saying, hey we’re having dinner, come on over. We’re not there yet...Is it something that we’re doing, is it something that they’re doing?...The friendship and bonds aren’t being built in a tight-enough fashion. I have several relationships with Hispanic/ Latino persons on a professional level, and those people, as I think about them, part of the problem are the age differences. They’re not in my age cohort. They’re older. For the most part they’re all older.

Ralph clearly would like to have more substantial relationships with Latinos, but it has not happened yet, and his ties to Latino colleagues (mostly older men) are strictly professional.

Dina, however, did once have a serious and intimate relationship across ethnic lines:

Dina: I used to go out with this guy from, was he from Costa Rica? I can’t remember. Colombia, I think. And he, when he came to this country, he was a foreman, construction foreman, the white people at the company told him that black people were lazy. He said, and that’s what we’re taught. They straight-up tell the Latino community, that black Men are lazy. And he said, I began to accept it as truth that that is why there are no black people working with us, because they’re all lazy. And so those kinds of things need to be addressed [before there can be substantial interethnic bonds].

Without real sustained social contact across ethnic lines, contact that can help dispel family-inherited stereotypes, mass media offerings become one of the most important disseminators of cross-ethnic information. According to most respondents, this prospect does not necessarily bode well for the future of African-American/Latino relations. “It’s the media,” Shelia agrees, “that has pitted the two communities against each other.” Dina agrees:

Dina: On a nation[al] level, when you look at the census and its saying there’s more Latinos now, outnumbering African-Americans, it’s like, why do they keep playing against that? And its experiencing how black people are feeling; we’re feeling we’re becoming extinct or that we’re losing power and so I think, yeah, I think when you constantly keep seeing that, like the whole census stuff, what is the whole point of stating the stuff like this, you know...If you can keep these different minority groups fighting amongst one another, then they’re never gonna come together.

Dina and Sheila’s position, which is not at all uncommon among our African-American respondents, represents an almost conspiratorial reading of how media venues perpetuate ethnic

conflicts in seemingly neutral news stories. These news stories make it incredibly difficult for African-Americans and Latinos to have fruitful and mutually beneficial conversations across linguistic and cultural barriers:

Richard: For the most part, the media's showing the Hispanics as very derogative, and also showing African-Americans as very derogative. And so you have groups of people who don't know each other and getting most of their information from a skewed source. And not realizing that that source is skewed. And so, of course, you then try to have a surface conversation, those assumptions kick-in, and quickly, disagreements...The media does have an effect on that relationship. So I think that's an issue, but how are the groups working to actively combat and bridge those gaps?

Bridging this gap that Richard notices between African-Americans and Latinos will take concerted effort from individuals on both sides of that ethnic divide. However, African-American ideas and assumptions about Latino difference only tell part of the story. If our interviews with African-Americans were able to show us patterns of observation and analysis within that community vis-à-vis their Latino neighbors, we may be able to find similar consistencies within the Latino community's understandings of African-American difference. In our final section, we begin to reverse the ethnographic and ethnohistorical gaze to examine in more detail the filtered view that Latinos have of African-Americans. But, complicating the story somewhat, we examine the lives of a particular subset of the Latino community that often elude scholarly and popular attention—Afro-Latinos.

Invisible Blackness: The “New South” as a Space for Afro-Latinos

While the previous section traces how African-Americans in North Carolina have started interpreting Latinos as inhabiting social spaces that blacks occupied in the past, as stepping into traditionally black class positions (sparking black-Latino tension), as replicating African-American gang culture, and through all of these processes, as partially adopting an ascribed African-Americanness (or an ascribed “blackness”), a specific component of the Latino immigrant community has seemingly escaped view—Afro-Latinos. Several of our respondents in Durham certainly demonstrated sensitivity to the layered, racial character of Latinos, even to the point of differentiating between both white and “dark” Latinos. Lightness of skin shade often correlated with nationality, as Puerto Ricans and Cubans were discussed as darker than Mexicans

and Guatemalans. But at the darkest end of the somatic register, references to outright Latino blackness never occurred. Part of the reason has to do with the structure of the discursive terrain. Issues of Latino relations have traditionally been thought of in terms of an almost mutually exclusive, triangular relationship, involving whites, blacks, and Latinos. Interrogation as to the “race” of Latinos has been limited. In examining Latino power, whiteness has mattered, since measuring white Latino success has worked both to show the level of Latino integration into the broader society, while at the same time signaling their “difference” from the upper tiers of Anglo power structures. Conversely, blackness has held lesser meaning, in part given the stigmas historically associated to blacks both domestically and in Latin America. Simply put, it has been a category that many immigrants have sought to avoid. Indeed, as somewhat of a counterweight to potential blackness, Latinoness has proven to be more than an ethnicity. A crucible of races, Latinoness is emerging in some circles as an intermediate racial type itself, analogous to “brownness.”³³

However, in North Carolina, important concentrations of the Latino immigrant community, especially in Winston-Salem, and also in Raleigh and Durham, are Afro-Mexicans. In this final section of our article we reflect on their experiences in the arena of racial formation. Afro-Mexicans represent a subset of the immigrant community for whom issues of racism and blackness have been part of their historical consciousness for centuries. The descendants of slaves, their blackness has been a critical marker for them in their hometowns. Does their “black” Mexican identity cause them to have different relationships with other Latinos and different immigrant experiences? Can their blackness serve as an important point of departure toward engendering community ties and a sense of solidarity with African-Americans in North Carolina? Or does their blackness create additional challenges for them with respect to their dealings with whites, African-Americans or other Latinos?

Decoding Afro-Mexican Blackness

Blackness, an identity that is of significant importance among Afro-Mexicans in their local negotiations of social status and identity in the Mexican countryside, is subordinated to

³³ Richard Rodríguez, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (Penguin, 2003)

other identities in North Carolina.³⁴ Specifically, a racially undifferentiated Hispanic identity emerges as a dominant marker. This represents a new understanding of blackness for Afro-Mexicans, who now find that they inhabit a domain where African-Americans, with whom Afro-Mexicans do not truly identify, monopolize the meaning of blackness. Historically, in the southern Costa Chica region that is home to most Afro-Mexican immigrants, one's self-identity as black (*negro* and *moreno*) was always juxtaposed against the social status of those who identified as indigenous (*indios*) or white (*mestizo* and *blanco*). In North Carolina, however, most Mexican immigrants, regardless of race, ethnicity, or region of origin, confront similar life experiences and share common challenges. Among these are the efforts to obtain unskilled jobs, learn English, form friendships with North Carolinians, and (for those without legal documents) to remain under the radar of immigration officials. Instead of an identity based on color gradations and ethnicity, Costa Chica natives (known as Costeños) conceive of themselves as Hispanics, and within that genre, they manifest a strong regional Mexican identity. They assert their status as Costeños, and as residents of particular towns and villages along the coast.³⁵

The lack of importance that Costeños ascribe to their blackness in North Carolina is due to a number of interrelated phenomena. First, in recent decades there has been an increasing *mestizaje* (race-mixing) in the Costa Chica itself, which has introduced far more *mestizos* into what were once almost entirely black towns.³⁶ As a result, the Costeño population that is now migrating to the U.S. is more racially mixed than it was decades ago. Consequently, they are less likely to be confused with African-Americans and little attention is called to their blackness by whites or African-Americans. In addition to the demographic changes occurring in Mexico, in North Carolina it appears that Hispanic identity trumps the ethnic distinctions that remain so very important in the Mexican context. In the Costa Chica, ethnicity (Afro-Mexican, Amuzgo, Mixtec, mestizo, etc.) is central to one's self-identification and plays a large role in how one is perceived by others. In North Carolina, there is very little knowledge of and appreciation for the

³⁴ This portion of the article is based upon extensive, long-term ethnographic fieldwork in the Costa Chica conducted by Bobby Vaughn, and ten days of ethnographic research in Winston-Salem (conducted by Bobby Vaughn and Ben Vinson).

³⁵ Importantly, while the Costa Chica region straddles the state line between Guerrero and Oaxaca, Costeños rarely assert a Guerrero or Oaxacan identity.

³⁶ In historical terms, *mestizos* represented the offspring of whites and indigenous peoples. In more contemporary times, *mestizos* comprise the normative Latin American somatic type, of mixed-race heritage, but usually excluding black lineage.

great variety of Mexican ethnicities.³⁷ These two factors produce a social landscape in which the small number of Afro-Mexicans becomes virtually invisible in their blackness, raising few eyebrows among North Carolinians.

The Changing Face of the Costa Chica

For at least three hundred years, Mexico's southern Costa Chica region has held one of the highest concentrations of Afro-Mexicans. These blacks descend from African slaves who were transported by the Spanish as part of a slave trade that was most active from the 1580s-1640. The historical record suggests that the slaves were initially used as laborers in the busy port of Acapulco, as well as in colonial cattle enterprises in the more rural regions.³⁸ As slaves acquired their freedom, a large free-black population came into existence, one that maintained an internal racial cohesion in many areas.³⁹ The 19th century witnessed the integration of blacks into the political movements of independence, but by and large, the Costa Chica's blacks experienced minor integration into national civic life, and were even left behind in terms of the greater processes of mestizaje that were taking place elsewhere.⁴⁰ By the twentieth century, mestizaje started to slowly influence the region, but still, published accounts highlighted the Costa Chica's blackness, as reflected in the titles of a few key works: The Study of the Black or African Race in Oaxaca (Martínez G., 1907); Brief Ethnographic Notes on the Black Population of the District of Jamiltepec, Oaxaca (Basauri, 1943); and The Costa Chica: Indians, Blacks, and Mestizos (Cervantes-Delgado, 1984).⁴¹

Oral histories taken amongst elders in the Costa Chica's towns confirm these perceptions by referencing a childhood in which almost all of the people in the region's townships were

³⁷ Interestingly, in parts of the United States, where large communities of indigenous Mexicans maintain their particular sub-national identity and continue to organize politically and maintain an important social cohesion based largely on their identity, not as Hispanics, but as Mixtecs and Zapotecs (see the incredibly rich edited volume by Fox and Rivera-Salgado (2004)).

³⁸ Joan Bristol, "Afro-Mexican Cowboys and Identity in New Spain's Frontiers," paper presented at the International Cultural Encounter in Cuba: History, Culture, and Society in the African Diaspora, Havana, Cuba, 2000.

³⁹ Ben Vinson III, "The Racial Profile of a Rural Mexican Province in the 'Costa Chica': Iqualapa in 1791," *The Americas* 57, no. 2 (2001): 269-282.

⁴⁰ Theodore G. Vincent, "The Blacks Who Freed Mexico," *The Journal of Negro History* 79, no. 3 (1994): 257-276.

⁴¹ Carlos Basauri, *Breves notas etnográficas sobre la población negra del Distrito de Jamiltepec, Oaxaca* (Mexico City: Primer Congreso Demográfico Interamericano, 1943), Roberto Cervantes-Delgado, "La Costa Chica: indios, negros y mestizos," in *Estratificación étnica y relaciones interétnicas* ed. M. Nolasco Armas, (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1984), 37-50, and Manuel Martínez G., "Estudio de la raza negra o africana en Oaxaca," in *Reseña histórica del antiguo reino de Tutupec* (1907).

black. In Collantes, responses such as those of Doña Marcelina Colón, are commonplace when issues of race and history are brought up in conversation:

“Everyone here has [always] been black. [It is] the foreigners who come ‘clean.’ But here, all-black.”

“The fishermen who live over there in Minizo—they are all black people.”

“Here in Minitán we are almost all blacks with curly hair.”⁴²

In the Costa Chica, Afro-Mexicans who are described as “pure black” are also called *cuculuste*, a local expression for “nappy-headed.” More commonly, these “very black” people are called *prietos* (dark) or “*negro negro*” as a way of emphasizing the perceived purity of their blackness.

Locals do not only speak of individuals or families as being black, but they also classify entire towns in racialized language. Most Costa Chica towns are commonly categorized by locals as either *pueblos negros* (black townships), *pueblos indios* (Indian townships), and *pueblos mestizos* (*mestizo* townships). These lines are clearly drawn in the minds of people, notwithstanding the national myth of Mexico being a mestizo nation, in which racial distinctions are meaningless.⁴³

It was not until 1966 that the Pacific Coast highway succeeded in bringing the Costa Chica’s towns and villages into much closer communication with Acapulco, which was the principal metropolitan center of the southern coast.⁴⁴ A reliable all-season highway to Acapulco meant increased access to Mexico City, and by extension, to the rest of the country. The Costa Chica was no longer isolated, and new, larger-scale agricultural and commercial interests arrived to exploit the region’s natural resources in ways that were previously impossible. The highway ushered in the arrival of large numbers of outsiders and their families. In contrast with the old entrenched landed elite, these new families were far more inclined to raise their families

⁴² The original responses in Spanish were: Todo de aquí ha sido pura gente negra. Los frasteros son los que vienen limpio. Pero aquí, puro negro.” “Los lancheros que vivían allá en Minizo – pura gente negra.” “Aquí en Minitán somos casi todos negros con pelo chino.”

⁴³ For more on the twentieth century ideological construction of Mexico as a mestizo nation, see: Agustín Basave Benítez, *México mestizo: análisis del nacionalismo en torno a la mestizofilia de Andrés Molina Enríquez* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992), Florencia E. Mallon, “Constructing Mestizaje in Latin America: Authenticity, Marginality, and Gender in the Claiming of Ethnic Identities,” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 2, no.1 (1996): 170-181; Bobby Vaughn, “Race and Nation: A Study of Blackness in Mexico,” Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2001.

⁴⁴ Laurentino Luna, “La reforma agraria en Cuajinicuilapa, Guerrero: micro-historia de una población Guerrerense,” (Licenciatura, UNAM 1975).

alongside the locals, inter-marry with them, and integrate themselves into rural communities, albeit in a more privileged class position. This post 1960s and 1970s migration precipitated a profound mestizaje that has only intensified over the past decade. As the Costa Chica's Afro-Mexican population experiences increased racial mixture and marital exogamy, the members of their population that migrate to North Carolina will increasingly meld into the broader Hispanic community.

From Negros to Costeños to Hispanos: Afro-Mexican Transformations in Winston-Salem

Whites, African-Americans, and Mexicans in North Carolina tend to talk about the recent Mexican immigration as a Hispanic issue. Costa Chica immigrants themselves have become accustomed to using the word *hispano*, a term that is unfamiliar in the rural communities from which they come. By *hispanos*, they mean “those of us who come from Mexico and other places; the Spanish-speaking people.” The use of *hispano* among Mexicans is striking in a place like Winston-Salem where the overwhelming majority of immigrants are Mexican and where *mexicano* would seem to be every bit as descriptive of their community as the broader *hispano*. Non-immigrant North Carolinians concur with this working definition of “Hispanic” that sees speaking Spanish as the focal cultural feature that defines a “Hispanic community,” in addition to a less-clear (but no less pervasive) notion of a Hispanic race.

One can expect non-immigrant North Carolinians to be unfamiliar with the ethnic distinctions that Mexicans use to differentiate amongst themselves (*moreno*, *mestizo*, *indigenous*, etc.). But the use of terms like *hispano* amongst *Costeños*, to the near exclusion of the ethnic markers with which they were raised, is surprising. Our ethnographic research reveals that the *Costeños* living in Winston-Salem clearly hadn't forgotten such distinctions; they simply lost relevance in their new American social context. Instead, the commonalities that all Mexican immigrants share tend to loom larger in a place where one's status in society is heavily determined by whether one speaks English, and whether one is legally residing in the state.

“There are almost no secure jobs for those *hispanos* who don't speak English,” we were told by a young Mexican man as we chatted on his stoop in Winston-Salem.⁴⁵ This was part of a conversation in which he explained how work was hard to come by, and how the minimum wage pay rate is barely enough to pay the utilities. His use of *hispano* seemed consistent with its

⁴⁵ In Spanish, he said: “Casi no hay trabajos seguros para los *hispanos* que no hablamos el ingles.”

pervasive usage in the Spanish-speaking media and among Spanish-speaking community workers who interact regularly with the immigrant community.⁴⁶

Some reflection on the day-to-day experience of immigrant Costeños provides a deeper understanding of how they understand their race and status, and how they come to read the term “hispano.” Hispanic identity is not a simple mimicry of a vocabulary to which Mexican immigrants have been introduced; rather, it represents both an internalization and a realignment of ideas, based upon how they view their common connections to a Latin-American based population that is carving a social space in the United States. In Winston-Salem most Mexican immigrants from the Costa Chica live in four or five enclaves comprising a number of low-income apartment complexes on the east side of town, particularly in Waughtown and the Lakeside community. Waughtown is a bustling, multi-ethnic neighborhood, buttressed by small mom and pop stores along Waughtown and Sprague streets. Lakeside, however, is almost entirely Mexican having shifted from being predominantly white in the 1950s, to being all-black in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴⁷

While a substantial concentration of Mexicans in Winston-Salem hails from throughout the Costa Chica, people have tended to settle in apartment complexes with others from their specific towns. An apartment complex, for instance, may consist of clusters from just two or three villages, while several blocks away, the residents may originate from a different group of towns. Such differentiation results from the strong ties that people have to their extended families and friends in Mexico. It is also an attempt to create a certain comfort zones of familiarity.

Costeño ties to their lives in Mexico are not only maintained by living in proximity to their compatriots, but also through the transnational experience of continually participating in the social and economic life of their hometowns. Much has been written about how the remittances of Mexican immigrants serve as a vital and sustaining force of the Mexican economy. The

⁴⁶ During a 15-minute interview in Spanish between Bobby Vaughn and a Puerto Rican journalist from the Spanish-language newspaper *Qué Pasa*, the word hispano was used consistently. The Winston-Salem based journalist who covers and advocates for the immigrant community did not talk about a Mexican community, but much like nearly all others with whom we spoke, used the broader category of Hispanic. Interestingly, the only time we heard the immigrants referred to as Mexican was in the rare derisive tone from African-Americans, such as “those Mexicans are taking over,” and such. Curiously, Hispanic may be used by many non-Mexicans as a polite or even politically-correct term, as opposed to Mexican, which they deem to be harsh or offensive.

⁴⁷ Amy Frazier and Carey Hamilton, “Where Home is No Haven; Sprawling Lakeside Apartment Complex, A Portrait of Housing in Decline,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, August 18, 2002.

practices of Costeños do not present an exception to the pattern. They struggle to send what they can back home, often to the point of finding themselves confronting the lofty expectations that their families have of them, and their rumored access to wealth and success in the United States.

Transnational links, return trips to Mexico, and residential clustering leads to the reproduction of some Costeño cultural manifestations in Winston Salem. These replications reinforce a surging Mexican regional identity that is sometimes misinterpreted by non-Latino North Carolinians as part of an essentialized “Hispanic” identity. Celebrations of the Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Winston-Salem’s Lakeside Apartments as well as the occasional dance party in which well-known bands from the Costa Chica perform as part of a United States tour, comprise elements of Costeño expressive culture.⁴⁸ While traditional medicinal practices maintain relevance for many Costeños, access to cures and healers are limited. One resident of Waughtown explained that she admonished a relative of hers back in Mexico not to join her in the United States because: “he was sick; we think it had to do with the *tono*⁴⁹ and they don’t know how to cure that here, so he needs to be taken care of there with the *curandero* before we think about sending for him.”

One of the clearest cultural manifestations of Costeño regional identity is found in the arena of sports. Young men flood three of Winston-Salem’s soccer fields on Sunday afternoons and Spanish-language newspapers cover the teams. Many are named for particular Costa Chica towns with which the players associate: teams such as San Nicolás, Montesillos, Costa Chica, Cuajinicuilapa, and El Pitayho. A small corner store in Waughtown is called “La Costa Chica” and its owner imports some goods directly from the region, including brands that are familiar to his customers.

Overall, however, our brief stint of ethnographic research in Winston-Salem demonstrates that Costeño cultural expressions are subordinated to the day-to-day difficulties these migrants share with other poor Latin American migrants. In Winston-Salem, most Mexican men and women work in low-skilled light industrial plants often involving cigarette packaging. Hourly wages hover near \$6.25. Such low wages often leave the migrants little

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ The *tono* (also called the *nagual* or simply as *el animal* can be understood as an animal spirit alter-ego that each individual is assigned at birth. This wild animal is a kindred spirit and roams the surrounding wilderness. Should harm befall this animal, its human counterpart will likewise fall ill (Aguirre Beltrán 1989).

choice but to live in poorly maintained apartment buildings, some of which have been the subject of public indignation.⁵⁰

Most Afro-Mexican migrants, after having paid some \$2000 to a *coyote* (guide) to lead them through an often deadly border crossing, are suddenly faced with navigating life in the United States without legal documents. Indeed, North Carolina's distance from the ever more militarized U.S.-Mexico border was one of the motivating factors that shifted the previous Costa Chica migrant flows from California to the Southeast. Nevertheless, state-wide legislation has made it impossible for undocumented migrants (excluding Canadians) to obtain or renew driver's licenses.⁵¹ Undocumented migrants express an uncertainty as to their rights and are often taken advantage of by unscrupulous landlords and employers. Indeed, some are even reluctant to report crime to the proper authorities for fear of having their immigration status called into question.⁵²

Undocumented Afro-Mexicans who have lived in California prior to arriving in North Carolina reported that their blackness was of particular value out West, where one is more preoccupied with evading authorities:

“[In California] we could walk around a little more comfortably [than other Mexicans] because the *migra* would think that we are Afro-Americans and not look twice at us.”
“Since we don't look like other Mexicans people aren't going to know that we are Mexicans until we open our mouths.”

The idea that Afro-Mexicans can better blend into the population than their mestizo counterparts is found in New York City, where Afro-Mexicans are often mistaken for Puerto Rican, Dominican, or other Afro-Caribbean ethnicities. Even in the Costa Chica itself, Costeños attach a transnational value to their blackness. In interviews and informal conversations with Bobby Vaughn, Costeños would sometimes propose (partially in jest) that he could help them with their entry into the United States by superimposing his North American blackness onto their

⁵⁰ Carey Hamilton, “City Checking Out Lakeside; Apartment Complex is Home to Many Hispanics, Poor Conditions,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 25, 2002.

⁵¹ Andrea Bazan-Mason, “On licenses, a shift into reverse: North Carolina's rule change will hurt hard-working immigrants,” *The Raleigh News and Observer*, January 7, 2004

⁵² A newspaper article (Guenzel 2004) explores how even when police do become involved, language barriers often prevent Winston-Salem police from adequately investigating crimes and responding appropriately in the Mexican community.

own: “Surely, if you and I went to the border in your truck, they would believe I was your relative, because we are both black, and they’d just let us through.”

In North Carolina, however, this sense that the darker-skinned Costeños enjoy an advantage in “passing” as African-American or Puerto-Rican seems muted because of the fact that people are far less fearful of the “migra” than they are in California. In Winston-Salem there is no palpable presence of the INS or Border Patrol, and informants explain that immigration raids are unheard of and, at least for now, fear of deportation is not as abiding a fear as it is for those Costeños living in California.

Being Black Together: Afro-Mexican and Afro-Mexican Relations

The significant differences in every-day life experiences between Afro-Mexicans and African-Americans, buttressed by their cultural and historical differences, have thus far prevented a socially viable solidarity. Future research must examine in greater depth the extent to which black Americans in Winston-Salem are aware of the blackness of a great segment of their Mexican neighbors. Additionally, more needs to be learned about Costeños’ view of African-Americans. The following are tentative findings that can serve as a basis for further reflection and research.

African-Americans interviewed in Winston-Salem expressed a range of views regarding the new immigration, consistent with the views of African-Americans in Durham:

“They’re taking over.” – African-American male, teenager.

“A lot of them speak English but act like they can’t.” – African-American male, 30s.

“I can’t blame them for doing what they have to do for their families.” – African-American male, 20s.

“They play their music too loud all night long.” – African-American female, 40s

“I don’t really know any well, but they don’t bother me.” – African-American male, 20s.

While evidence exists of friction between African-Americans and Latinos in North Carolina, this has been less pronounced in Winston-Salem. Settlement patterns here have tended to segregate the Latino community. While further work is needed to confirm these tentative observations, it appears that as Mexicans began arriving to Waughtown and other parts of East Winston-Salem, African-Americans moved north and west to existing black communities. As opposed to other North Carolina cities, fewer Mexicans moved to the more symbolically

significant downtown areas, but settled in Waughtown and revitalized the area with new economic activity.⁵³

In Waughtown, the strip mall known as King's Plaza once housed a number of African-American-owned businesses. One of the few left is a black beauty supply store. A young African-American employee confirmed that a kind of "black flight" is taking shape in Waughtown:

Seems like [the] more they move into the area, the more we [blacks] move somewhere else. I don't really know why we move away (laughs). I guess we just want to go where there are more black people. I've noticed that in the last year, as more Hispanics moved into the area, fewer black people come into the store, and they [the Hispanics] don't really buy what we sell here. And I tell you one thing, whenever a store goes out of business around here they buy it and open up a store for themselves. To be honest, I'll be surprised if we last more than a year here. We have to go where we can get more black customers.

This conversation exemplifies a kind of ambivalence expressed many blacks in Winston-Salem. There is a recognition that Waughtown is becoming increasingly Hispanic, but there has not been the kind of concern or, much less, panic that one might expect. A kind of resignation seems to have set in and blacks appear to have no shortage of attractive predominantly black neighborhoods to which to relocate as alternatives to Waughtown.

The tendency for African-Americans to move to other neighborhoods is not lost on the newly-arriving Costeños. In the Lakeside Apartments, Ricardo, a young man from San Nicolás was explicit in this regard:

Yeah, when we moved here 2 years ago our next door neighbors were black, and a few houses across the street were African-American. I don't know why they left, we got along pretty well, I thought.
As for where the African-Americans might have gone: "I have no idea (laughs)! I guess they went wherever there aren't a lot of us; I don't know."

None of the African-Americans with whom we spoke were aware that perhaps a majority of the Mexicans in Winston-Salem are of African descent. Typical of some of the responses is: "I never really thought about it, but yeah, some of them are pretty dark. I had no idea."

⁵³ Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (London: Verso, 2000)

One might speculate that if there were poor relations between African-Americans and Mexicans in Winston-Salem, then appeals to the shared black heritage of both communities might serve to successfully create a kind of common-ground. The model of Southern California immediately comes to mind, where African-American community activists have been exploring shared racial links to build a spirit of inter-ethnic fraternity with Mexicans.⁵⁴ Indeed, in Winston-Salem such an idea was offered by Marta, an Afro-Mexican woman from Cuajinicuilapa. Marta is well aware of the emerging México Negro organization in the Costa Chica—a grass-roots movement that has, since 1997, attempted to engage in social action at the local level through an explicit discourse with Afro-Mexican ethnic identity (see Vaughn (2001) for more on Mexico Negro). Marta bemoans a lack of identification among Afro-Mexicans and African-Americans:

In Mexico, we try to come together as black people and here nobody even realizes that we come from the same roots. I think that if the African-Americans knew about our common history we would get along better. In Mexico we are just starting to learn about our history, but here the African-Americans know their history; that's their advantage.

In Mexico, Afro-Mexicans who share Marta's view of the importance of positive black-identification are still a minority, as most Costeños prefer to downplay their blackness because of its heavy historical stigmas. Those Afro-Mexicans, like Marta, who have bucked the trend and have sought to re-appropriate blackness are more often educated and professional—they are somewhat less likely to migrate to the United States. This helps to further account for a lack of overt overtures to black identity among Costeños in North Carolina.

If a greater sense of the African Diaspora and inter-ethnic solidarity is to arise between Costeños and African-Americans, we might look to the younger generations for possibilities. The Costeño youth is learning English and is interacting with African-Americans, whites, and others in the public school system. It is this close interaction that may draw all communities into deeper conversation. Seventeen year-old Cipriano, a Costeño from Punta Maldonado, arrived to

⁵⁴ Ron Wilkins, "Black and Brown Liberation," *Los Angeles Times*, Sunday, May 1, 1994, Ron Wilkins, "Third Root History and Photography, Tools for Building the Mexicano-Africano Alliance in Los Angeles," Statement by Ron Wilkins Deputy Chairman of the Patrice Lumumba Coalition at the Quinto Encuentro de Afromexicanistas, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico, 25-27 October, 1995, (Los Angeles: Patrice Lumumba Coalition).

Winston-Salem two years ago. The tattooed young man who admittedly struggles with English was immediately drawn to African-Americans and made friends quickly, some of them in the apartment complex where he lived:

A lot of people [Mexicans] are scared of blacks and are suspicious of them but I never was. I always liked their music, you know, like Eminem and 50 Cent. [...] Sometimes people see that I like hanging out with them and they ask me if I know them, if they are friends of mine, and if I'm not getting into trouble (laughs)! [...] Of course, I hang out with people from my town [Punta Maldonado] most of the time, but would like to have more African-American friends because I seem to click with them.

Cipriano was initially drawn to the hip hop youth culture while in Mexico, where he was exposed to images from American television and movies. Often, the content of the movies and shows were themed around inner city life and street gangs—highlighting violence, fashions and hip hop music. During the course of conducting our research, it appeared that many Mexican immigrant youth in Winston Salem wore the loose-fitting clothing and name brands commonly associated with the hip hop generation. But clearly, associating oneself with the fashions and music of black America and actually socially interacting with black people are two different enterprises. Cipriano seemed to be one of the few Costeños we met who has made concrete efforts to engage with black people.

It must be said that while the imagined culture of African-Americans, as expressed in hip-hop culture, might attract Mexican immigrants such as Cipriano, it is likely to deter other young Costeños who are less inclined toward counter-cultural experiences, and whose world view is less cosmopolitan and more firmly rooted in the local agrarian traditions of their homeland. Further research must look to the varied experiences of Afro-Mexican youth in schools. Issues of racial identification are likely to impact Afro-Mexican youth in ways that differ from the impact felt by their parents. Such impacts are likely to correlate to whether they were born in United States, what age they emigrated to the United States, and their English proficiency. Deeper research in North Carolina might further illuminate the concerns and experiences of a teenage girl from Cuajinicuilapa who has lived in Chicago since age four. In an e-mail, she wrote (in English):

I also want to learn more in detail about my background. My mother has told me very little but I want to find my real identity. All these years I've been mistaken for Cuban and never viewed as a Mexican. When I start speaking Spanish people are surprised I speak it very fluently. My sister and I feel sometimes out of place everywhere we go because barely nobody has the same cultural background. We feel very awkward in a group of all Mexicans, like in parties or Mexican stores. They look at us with ignorance, or I don't know how to explain it.

Ethnographic research in North Carolina and other centers of Afro-Mexican migration can begin to allow this young lady known to us as “soydecuaji” (I am from Cuaji)⁵⁵ to better understand her heritage and make sense of it in the context of a Mexican immigrant experience in which issues of Mexican blackness are usually left out of the prevailing discourses.

In summary, preliminary field research suggests that in Winston-Salem the Afro-Mexican heritage of new immigrants plays less a role in their every-day lives, as contrasted with both contemporary Costeño experiences in the Costa Chica and with historical Afro-Mexican experiences. Mexican “negros and morenos” become Hispanic in North Carolina, where they find that the African-American experience monopolizes discussions of blackness. Indeed, it is quite possible that in the context of the New South, alternate forms of blackness—in particular, Diasporic blackness that originates from outside the United States—may be largely silenced under the weight of the legacy created by the history of blacks in the region. But for Afro-Mexicans living in North Carolina, there is still more to the story. Patterns of increased mestizaje in Mexico have lessened the likelihood that Costeños will tend to identify themselves based on physical markers, and it has made it more difficult for African-Americans to even recognize Mexican blackness. Perhaps more important, however, are the significantly dissimilar life and class experiences that differentiate between the newly-arrived, non-English speaking, and often undocumented Mexican population, as opposed to the black sons and daughters of the American South. It remains to be seen how the two communities might come together in the future. While solidarity between blacks and Latinos often arises from shared social and economic interests, in the case of Winston-Salem, perhaps the unique history of the Costeños will serve as points of reflection for both communities who represent an ever-complex African Diaspora.

⁵⁵ In using this e-mail name, note the search for regional identification and affiliation in her transnational life. As with others, her transnationality may heighten a sense for regional belonging, or at least a fuller understanding of the multiple (and intersecting) regional/racial/ethnic dimensions of her existence.

